

A Robin Singh revelation

MUMBAI, July 7: In a startling disclosure, all-rounder Robin Singh said the Indian World Cup team management was unsure about the method by which points were to be carried from the first phase into the Super Six stage of the championship till the end of their first league match, reports PTI.

The revelation by Robin Singh, who was here en route to his adopted home of Chennai after visiting his ailing father at his birthplace, Trinidad, highlighted the team management's lack of preparation for the mega event.

The team management, he was referring to, consisted of captain Mohammad Azharuddin, vice-captain Ajay Jadeja, coach Anshuman Gaekwad and manager Brijesh Patel and the squad had reached England as early as April 24.

"As a player I am interested in knowing the format of the tournament but no one gave us (rest of the players) the right answers about the points to be carried forward till the end of the match against South Africa," Robin told reporters here last night.

"I feel we would have won against South Africa if we had scored 275. At one stage, it looked attainable when we were 190 for one with 12 overs left," the all-rounder said.

"I do not want to put any blame on the format for our failure to make it to the semifinals. If we had won against South Africa and then not lost to Zimbabwe, we would have been easily in the last four," he pointed out.

"A lot of people have said our loss to Zimbabwe cost us dearly, but I want to emphasise that the loss to South Africa was the more important one. The final analysis is we could not score enough runs from the commanding position we were in. We put on only 62 runs in the last 12 overs despite the fact that we had lost only one wicket. Even here the last 3 overs got us 30 runs," he said.

"The South Africans were looking dejected when we were 190 for one. They were not getting the wickets and I know the thoughts that must have gone in their brains. But we did not get enough runs from that position. Against Australia too in the super six stage the batters let us down," Singh said.

"A lot of people have blamed only the bowlers for our performance. What about the batters? We had the best batting line-up in the entire tournament and we did not bat out any team except Sri Lanka. There were a lot of individual performances but not a combined effort on the whole. When the batting clicked, the bowling failed and when the bowling clicked the batting did not come off. We did not seize our chances," the Chennai-based cricketer said.

Robin was very hurt at being dropped for the England match after taking five wickets in the previous Group-A match against Sri Lanka and of being told about his omission only the morning of the tie against the tournament hosts.

Bigger tennis balls!

NOORDWIJK, Netherlands, July 7: The International Tennis Federation (ITF) submitted its proposal on Tuesday to slow the game by introducing bigger balls, reports Reuters.

The governing body want a two-year experiment in which balls eight per cent larger but no heavier are used. They would travel slower and bounce higher, giving the receiver of service about 10 per cent more reaction time.

The experiment would be conducted from club level to the lower reaches of the Davis and Fed Cups.

There are concerns over the speed of the game and the dominance of the serve, especially on faster surfaces. A larger ball may have a number of potential benefits which we would only realise or not with experiments," said ITF spokesman Alub James.

The ITF is saying it needs to know much more about the inter-relationship between balls, court surfaces and rackets.

A final decision will be made at the ITF's annual meeting on Thursday or Friday.

Critics claim that with service speeds in men's and women's tennis reaching 240 kph and 205 kph respectively, the prospect of rallies lessens and damages entertainment value.

US Davis Cup team O'Brien fills last spot

CHESTNUT HILL, Massachusetts, July 7: Alex O'Brien was named as the fourth and final member of the US Davis Cup team that will play Australia and is expected to partner Wimbledon champion Pete Sampras in the doubles, reports Reuters.

The selection of O'Brien was announced Monday night at the Longwood Cricket Club, the site of the July 16-18 matches, at a 120th birthday celebration of Davis Cup founder Dwight Davis.

The quarterfinal tie between Australia and the United States marks a 100th-year celebration of Davis Cup. The first matches in the national team competition were contested between the United States and Britain at Longwood in 1900.

O'Brien joins Sampras, Jim Courier and Todd Martin on the US squad.

The 29-year-old O'Brien will be making his third appearance on the US team, having gone 1-2 in Davis Cup play.



The US Women's World Cup squad jogging at Claremont, California, on July 6.—AFP photo

Americans soccerised



CLAREMONT, California, July 7 (AP): Soccermania has hit the United States.

In the midst of one of its countless bus rides during the Women's World Cup, the US team was told that Saturday's final against China was sold out. The Rose Bowl will be filled, just as it was for the men's championship five years ago. And this time, President Bill Clinton will attend.

"We all kind of jumped out of our seats and were pumping our fists and yelling and cheering," Brandi Chastain said Tuesday. "What a great tribute," Cindy Parlow added. "I think the fans appreciate how much we appreciate their coming to the games and coming out to see us."

The Women's World Cup has become a phenomenon in this country. Sure, soccer isn't a high-visibility sport in America and the Major League Soccer is struggling to draw fans and television ratings.

But the American women have captured the imagination of the nation with their forthrightness, friendliness and accessibility.

"It's something we want to do," Tiffany Milbrett said. "We'll stay and sign autographs and

we'll talk to the fans because we want to do it, not because someone tells us we should. It's important to them and it's important to us."

Clinton, who attended the quarterfinal victory over Germany in Landover, Maryland, decided Tuesday to extend his seven-state trip across the country through the weekend so he can attend the final. In 1994, Clinton went to the World Cup opener in Chicago, and Vice President Gore went to the final.

After the team's first practice in preparation for the final, the players were interviewed by reporters from television networks and national news magazines.

What they found is what those following the team for the last month have long known. This is a refreshing group of athletes who understand exactly what is happening, and cherish it.

"We've been excited by the tournament and overwhelmed by the response," Chastain said. "I knew there was a special package we had to offer and now we are getting a chance to present it."

What makes it extra special is that the women are doing it on their own. While they were one of the more popular teams at the 1996 Olympics, they shared the spotlight with the US basketball, softball and

gymnastics teams that won gold medals. This time, the Americans and Chinese and Brazilians are selling soccer — and selling out major league stadiums.

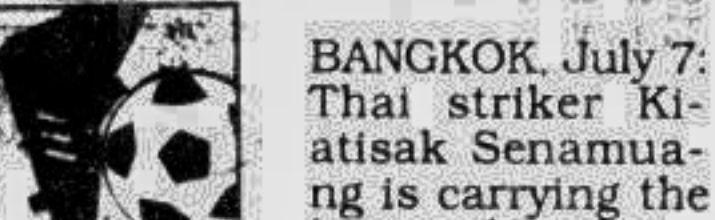
"It doesn't hurt, either, that the teams generally have given the US public what it craves: wide-open play, lots of scoring, spectacular goalkeeping and passion."

"It makes us smile. It's really flattering that the fans see that from us," Tisha Venturini said. "They see how much you can enjoy what you're doing."

Can they really enjoy the prospect of facing China, which has been the best team in the tournament and routed defending champion Norway 5-0 in the semifinals?

"I remember back in the FIFA All-Star game in February, the Chinese keeper (Gao Hong) saying, 'It will be China and US in the World Cup final,'" Milbrett said. "I really believe that's how it should be. We've earned it."

A Thai's Premiership goal



BANGKOK, July 7: Thai striker Kiatasak Senamuang is carrying the hopes of his foot-

ball-crazy nation on his shoulders as he chases his dream of a lucrative career with English Premier League Middlesbrough, reports AFP.

Kiatasak, skipper of the national team, has just started a two-week trial with the club, which fields troubled midfielder star Paul Gascoigne and is managed by Manchester United legend Bryan Robson.

Thailand's national team coach, Peter Witte, a former Aston Villa and England striker, said he believed Kiatasak had the ability to make a mark in English football.

"He had only two weeks of preparation but his speed and tactical awareness are good enough for the Premier League," Witte was quoted as saying in the Thai Press.

"His desire will help him to succeed," he said.

Kiatasak, 26, nicknamed "Zico" after the great Brazilian, burst to prominence when he led Thailand to the gold medal at the Southeast Asian Games in Singapore six years ago.

Palis club of Malaysia for a season.

"If I have the chance I would certainly go to play with other foreign teams again," he was quoted as saying in Thai newspapers before he left for England on Saturday.

"I think working with the real professional team will improve my skill a lot," he said.

Boro spotted Kiatasak on a pre-season tour of Thailand two years ago.

"We just thought we would have a look at him," Robson was quoted as saying in the Thai Press.

Kiatasak's progress in England is being followed with extensive coverage in the Thai language press and with frequent updates on television.

If he were to secure a contract with Middlesbrough, Kiatasak would be following an Asian trail blazed by several Japanese and Chinese stars starting to force their way into professional squads in England and Europe.

Kiatasak's quest is being closely watched by Thailand's football association, which is

trying to turn the country into an Asian footballing power.

European football, especially the English premier league, is followed fervently by Thais.

The trade in replica football shirts and soccer memorabilia is worth millions of dollars a year here and many of the top teams indulge their passion for betting with live satellite television.

Their appetites have been whetted recently with visits by top premier league clubs on summer tours.

Thailand's national side recently beat a jet-lagged Arsenal, English double winners in 1998, and are about to embark on qualifying campaigns for the Southeast Asian Games and the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

The side is also building for the 2002 World Cup Finals which will be held in Asia for the first time when they are co-hosted by Japan and South Korea.

Clinton will grace the WWC final

EAST ST LOUIS, Illinois, July 7: Diehard sports fan President Bill Clinton has rearranged his busy schedule so that he can see the Women's World Cup final in California Saturday, reports AFP.

"It will be the most watched woman's sports event in US history," explained his spokesman Jack Siewert.

Clinton was on a four-day trip to drum up investment in America's poverty-stricken pockets and was due to head home Thursday after a final stop in Los Angeles. But Siewert said Clinton — and his huge entourage — would be staying on for the match.

Saturday's championship game at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, features a rematch of the 1996 Olympic final won by the host US team, which has lost two of three prior matches against China this year.

College basketball is Clinton's favourite sport and he spends many a day on the golf course, but he is an avid spectator of just about any game and the success of the US women's football team has boosted interest here beyond the wildest dreams of the FIFA.

Clinton, his wife Hillary and daughter Chelsea were among 54,642 at Cooke Stadium in Landover, Maryland who saw the US teams 3-2 triumph over Germany.

Clinton met in the locker room after the game with the women's team, which invited him to attend the final Saturday, Siewert said.

ACB releases list No room for Elliott

SYDNEY, July 7: Former Test opening batsman Matthew Hayden is set for a surprise recall to the Test team after Matthew Elliott was today dumped from the Australian Cricket Board's list of 25 contracted players for the coming season, reports AFP.

Left-hander Hayden, thought to have been out of calculations after a poor tour of South Africa in 1997, was added to the list, heightening speculation he will go with the Australian team to Sri Lanka next month and Zimbabwe in October.

An ACB statement said contract selection had been based on form and the likelihood of Australian selection over the next 12 months.

Elliott, recalled in February when Mark Taylor retired, had wretched tour of the West Indies earlier this year and was dropped for the final Test in Antigua.

With Justin Langer at No 3, the Waugh twins and Ricky Ponting filling out the Test lineup, it looks as though Hayden will return to the national team despite a modest 1998-99 Sheffield Shield average of 40.35.

However, he has a 68.1 average in this season's English county championship for Northamptonshire, scoring an impressive four centuries in 11 innings.

Young West Australian left-hander Simon Katich can also start packing his bags for the Sri Lankan tour after winning his first contract — worth a minimum 65,000 dollars (43,000 US).

Captain Steve Waugh and the three-man panel requested the ACB blood a young player as 15th man and Katich, 23, has the goods following his 1,039 first-class runs at 61.12 last season.

Those winning first-time contracts were English-born all-rounder Andrew Symonds, Queensland paceman Adam Dale, NSW all-rounder Shane Lee and versatile Tasmanian bowler Colin Miller.

Those not to have their contracts renewed were Queensland ex-Test paceman Michael Kasprowicz and Andrew Bichel, New South Wales spinner Gavin Robertson and South Australian spinner Brad Young.

Australia play four one-dayers in Sri Lanka followed by three Tests, before flying to Zimbabwe for an inaugural Test and three one-dayers.

Contracted players receive a base retainer, tour fees and match fees when playing at home.

Under a formula agreed with the Australian Cricketers Association, the minimum retainer is 65,000 dollars and the maximum 220,000 dollars.

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Eurasian play-off proposed

LOS ANGELES, July 7 (Reuters/AFP): FIFA has pushed back the date of next year's vote for the 2006 World Cup by four months, throwing into turmoil the carefully laid plans of the five candidates — England, Germany, South Africa, Morocco and Brazil.

In a separate development, FIFA also announced that Europe would be giving up half a place at the next finals in 2002 and handing it to Asia, which is jointly hosting the tournament.

The 24-man FIFA executive committee was expected merely to select a date for a March vote when it came to discussing the 2006 World Cup.

Instead, it decided on Tuesday to delay the vote until July to allow all five bids to be studied by the individual continental congresses.

By March, the original date of the vote, only South America and Africa would have staged their congresses. UEFA, representing Europe, do not hold theirs until June 30. As a result, said FIFA president Sepp Blatter, "It was decided to put all confederations and candidates on an equal footing."

England's campaign team, led by Alec McGivan, were not immediately perturbed by the sudden change. "Several members of executive committee felt it was important that each bid presented itself to their confederations," said McGivan.

"Obviously it prolongs the agony but we'd be very happy to go to every confederation in the world at any time."

Chuck Blazer, general secretary of CONCACAF which cov-

ers north and central America and who proposed the four-month delay, said all he was doing was being fair to the candidates and confederations alike.

"Traditionally, World Cup votes are only taken after each continental congress. This was the first time that would not have happened," he told Reuters. "It is only right that the representative confederations of the executive committee members get a chance to study the bids."



The new date also means that the deadline for submitting full and detailed bid documents to FIFA has been extended. Candidates now have until August 10 to hand in their bids, instead of July 31.

In an equally significant ruling, FIFA announced that Asia would gain an extra half place at the next World Cup fi-

nals, being hosted jointly by Japan and South Korea.

Europe, which had 15 spots at France '98, will now have 14 automatic berths, playing off with Asia for the last qualifying position.

Asia was originally granted four places for the 2002 finals, the same number it had in France. But because it is jointly hosting the next tournament, it wanted one more full berth, making five in all.

Instead, FIFA compromised and gave the Asians four and a half. FIFA vice-president Chung Moon-joon, who is also president of the Korean Football Association, said half a place was not enough and that anyway, he did not trust Europe's pledge to play off for the last qualifying place.

He re-issued the same veiled threat of several months ago that Asia would consider boycotting the tournament if they didn't get what they wanted.

"If Europe does not end up agreeing, we will have to reconsider our position in the tournament," he said.

FIFA president Blatter said that although UEFA still had to confirm the new arrangement at its own executive meeting, he could not understand Chung's comments.

Dr Chung made it clear that he was happy with the situation, Blatter said.

The views he may have expressed afterwards are not the same as those expressed in the executive committee. Besides, I don't think an organising country would not to play the tournament."

Multipurpose Sun Wen



CLAREMONT, California, July 7 (AP): She writes poetry, studies Chinese literature, and sings a soulful "Candle in the Wind." This weekend, Sun Wen will be centre stage for another of her talents.

With millions of people in the United States and even more in her native country watching on television, Sun will lead China in the Women's World Cup championship game against the Americans.

The university student from Shanghai, a magician with a

soccer ball at her feet, is the tournament's leading scorer with seven goals. She is so feared that the Americans might pay her the ultimate soccer compliment by marking her — assigning one defender to stick on her like glue.

"She's an all-around great player," US coach Tony DiCicco said. "She has such good vision, can find the open spots and get the ball to her teammates. And now she's really finishing, scoring a lot."

"She's at the top of her game."

After a leisurely practice at Pomona-Pitzer College on Tuesday, Sun, quick to laugh, held court for half an hour for a small group of reporters under a

shade tree just off the practice field.

The 26-year-old forward is one of the finest players in the world, a long shot because girls haven't been encouraged to play soccer in China.

"My father was a real soccer fan, a former player, and he encouraged me to play," Sun said through an interpreter. "I started to play when I was 10 and started regular training when I was 13."

"Most fathers in China can't accept girls playing soccer. It's the culture. Girls are supposed to be shy and steady and not so active."

"My father is very proud now."

Sun said the women's team has sparked interest in China, with all its World Cup games being broadcast back home. She believes the attitude that girls shouldn't play the game is changing, and another big step in that direction can be taken Saturday.

"It is very, very important that we win now, for ourselves and for China," she said.

Some of her poetry has been published in newspapers, she said, and she also enjoys karaoke, listing "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" and "My Heart Will Go On" among her favourite songs.

"I sing them in English," she said. "The interpreter added, 'She is a very, very good singer in English.'"

China was host of the first Women's World Cup, in 1991, but the fans' interest waned dramatically when China lost in the quarterfinals of the tournament won by the United States.

Sun has been very impressed by the World Cup crowds this year, which have included numerous Chinese fans. The Rose Bowl will have a sellout crowd approaching 90,000 for Saturday's game.

"It's amazing," she said. "This is a very good place for women's soccer."

Sun said she would consider playing in the United States if plans to begin a women's professional league in 2001 materialize.

"The best soccer can be played on a professional level," she said. "The best environment for soccer now is in the US. So, yes."



China's top strikers Sun Wen (L) and Lui Ying at a practice session in California on July 6. The Chinese take on USA in the final of the Women's World Cup on Saturday.

— AFP photo

Russians rule the day

PALMA DE MALLORCA, Spain, July 7: Russian gymnast Svetlana Khorkina collected two more gold medals at the World Student Games on Tuesday, taking her overall tally to four, reports Reuters.

She won the asymmetric bars and floor exercises. Khorkina's victory on the bars, earning her 9.800 points, was the best score in the women's individual apparatus events.

Compatriot Elena Prudnova took her own gold medal tally to three by winning the vault.

Russia's Nikolay Kriukova was the only double gold medalist in the men's apparatus, winning the parallel bars and horizontal bar. He also collected a silver in the vault, finishing behind Cuba's Abel Driggs.

Bulgaria's Ivan Ivanov produced the best single performance with a rings routine worth 9.800 points.

In the pool, Japan's Miki Nakao set a Games record in the women's 200 metres backstroke.

The economics student swam two minutes 10.32 seconds to slice nearly a second off the 1993 mark of American swimmer Whitney Hedgepeth and retain the title she won two years ago in Italy.

At the halfway point Nakao was behind her teammate Tomoko Hagihara who won the 100 metres butterfly on Sunday. But she showed her strength in the second half of the race.

Hagihara hung on to take the silver medal in 2:11.96. "I never expected to do so well here. It has been a difficult trip because of all the travel-

ling," Nakao said. "I'm now looking forward to the Pan-Pacific next month, although I know that the opposition will be a lot stronger."

The closest race of the day was won by Russia's Andrei Permynov in the men's 100 metres breaststroke.

He stopped the clock at 1:03.16, with Japan's Akira Hayashi touching just one hundredth of a second later.

Hayashi had a barely discernible lead at the turn but his Russian rival just edged in front in the final few metres.

Czech Hana Cerna bagged her second individual gold medal in the women's 400 metres freestyle, winning in 4:14.14 to add to the 400 metres individual medley victory she achieved on Sunday.

The United States had their quietest day in the pool after they collected eight gold medals over the first two days of the swimming programme.

They added to their tally in the women's 4x100 metres relay, winning in 3:47.98, with 200 metres freestyle gold medalist Kimberley Black producing an outstanding second leg to ensure victory.

Meanwhile, American sprinter John Capel has withdrawn from the 200 metres, despite being joint second fastest in the world this year at the distance.

Capel, studying sociology at the University of Florida, said on Tuesday that he was going to concentrate on the 100 metres and 4x100 metres relay.

MEDALS TABLE
Medal table after the fourth day of competition at the World

Student Games on Tuesday (tabulated — gold, silver, bronze):

Russia	12	6	5
United States	9	0	5
Japan	4	4	4
Belarus	2	2	0
Republic	2	2	0
Cuba	2	1	1
Ukraine	1	5	3
Italy	1	4	2
Romania	1	2	0
China	1	2	6
S Africa	1	0	1
S Korea	0	2	2
Australia	0	2	1
France	0	2	1